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Mattress support systems: Reframing foundations

By BedTimes (https://bedtimesmagazine.com/author/bed_times/) on January 2015

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BY GARY JAMES

With advances in construction and style, bed frames and foundations take on a stronger supporting role

Traditional bed frames and foundations—historically, an overlooked or undersold element in a typical sleep system—are gaining more attention lately due to enhancements in construction, styling and functionality.

At the same time, however, a surge in the popularity of step-up, adjustable foundations has taken away a sizable portion of the market that used to buy traditional frames and foundations along with their new mattresses.



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/W-Silver-F60012-a.jpg>)

W. Silver Products' best-selling F60012 model, part of its standard bed frame line, is made of recycled, high-carbon, angled railroad steel with a high strength-to-weight ratio. The next photo shows the rail steel before it enters the W. Silver Inc. furnace in El Paso, Texas, for processing.

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“Attachment rates for adjustable foundations have grown as high as 25% for many retailers,” says Dan Baker, vice president of sales at Glideaway in St. Louis. “That’s caused some of the market for traditional frames to shrink, but the good news is that retail sales associates are talking more about the role frames play in supporting quality sleep.”

“I’m beginning to see many more conversations on sales floors about the role of the foundation,” agrees Dennis Rodgers, president of Forever Foundations in Irvine, California. “What once was considered a ‘giveaway’ brought up at the end of the sale has evolved into an important part of the sales conversation. There’s a growing understanding that if you don’t have the proper bed-frame support, the chances for eventual mattress failure are greatly increased.”



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/W-SilverRail-Steel.jpg>)

Rail steel ready for W.Silver's furnaces

More than ever, mattresses need a strong frame or foundation to perform properly, and suppliers have responded by expanding the features available, creating a whole range of new step-up opportunities.

Enhancing style

At the winter Las Vegas Market Jan. 18-22, Glideaway plans to introduce a Designer Upholstered Rail accessory that can be attached to the side rails of any frame to add an extra touch of style. Two designs will be available—a fabric look and a leather look.

“This accessory jazzes up the frame, making it appear more like a platform bed,” Baker says. “The price, with one of our higher-end frames, will run about \$179 retail, which keeps it highly affordable.”

Glideaway’s current stationary frame line starts at \$39 retail for a twin and tops out around \$119 in queen. Models range from the 100% recyclable Eco bed frame at the promotional end to the heavy-duty Glide-A-Matic line, which is designed to provide extra support. The company’s frames feature re-rolled American railway steel processed for use in bedding by Jersey Shore Steel.



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Glideaway’s desktop display

“We offer a good-better-best assortment, and we provide visual display tools so that retailers can show all the choices that are available without taking up a lot of space,” Baker says. He adds that sales activity in the “better-best” range is on the rise, “since consumers need a higher quality frame to support the premium mattresses they are buying, which are much heavier than in the past.”



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Glideaway-Good-Better-Best-Steel-Display-12-20-2013-side-view.jpg>)

St. Louis-based Glideaway’s point-of-purchase tools include two display units—a floor rack, and (next photo) a mini-display of good-better-best options, for use on sales desks.

To educate RSAs about its frame assortment, including adjustable models, Glideaway offers a comprehensive in-store training program through its sales rep force.

“We urge RSAs to bring up the frame right away, along with pillows and a mattress protector, so that the consumer isn’t surprised to learn that they may need these products to make the most of the new mattress that they’re buying,” Baker says. “All of these elements work in tandem, and if the consumer doesn’t have the right support system for their mattress, their sleep experience may not be what they expected.”



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Mantua-Express-Yourself-Wood-Legs-Amber-Valance.jpg>)

Mantua Mfg.’s Express Yourself line offers consumers a choice of wood or steel legs and 16 valance designs, including this amber version. Mantua is based in Walton, Ohio.

Baker adds that he still sees a vibrant market for promotionally priced traditional frames, despite the rise in adjustables, since the majority of mattresses sold are priced under \$1,000 “and most of those customers can’t afford an adjustable base.”



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/BoydHANNAH-BLACK.jpg>)

Boyd Specialty Sleep, based in Maryland Heights, Missouri, introduced a new metal platform bed package that includes headboard, footboard and side rails shipped as one flat-packed unit. The program includes five contemporary designs, including the stylish Hannah model shown here.

Two distinct businesses

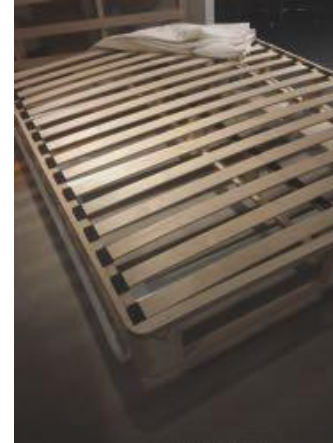
Currently, there are two main areas of activity in the bed frame category, according to Niles Cornelius, national product manager for HSM Solutions in Hickory, North Carolina.

One is higher-end product, where enhanced features and innovative styling are making inroads on many retail floors. This segment starts around \$299 and tops out around \$599—the point where many adjustable frames begin.

The second area, where the bulk of frame business still takes place, is the commodity segment—units priced around \$39 to \$49. Features and price points in this segment have remained relatively constant over time. “This customer simply wants the lowest price product they can buy,” Cornelius says.

Still, most companies have moved away from the mindset that a frame is something that must be given away or sold at a minimum profit to clinch the sale, Cornelius says. “Today, frames represent a healthy profit center, and there’s a lot of activity under \$99. This has been a very positive change, since frames are increasingly being positioned as an important part of the overall sleep system with a value of their own.”

HSM’s
core
frame



(https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Salem-Sleep-Euro-Style-Port-A-Foundation-20140730_175153.jpg)

Salem Sleep Products’ Euro Slat Port-A-Foundation features 16 slats spaced 2.5 inches apart for extra strength. Based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Salem Sleep promotes its entire Port-a-Foundation line as easy to transport via UPS or FedEx and easy to assemble.



(https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Knickerbocker-emBrace_contemp_Black.jpg)

Carlstadt, New Jersey-based Knickerbocker Bed Frame Co.'s emBrace support system features high-strength steel wrapped in a colorful polymer. The system attaches easily to existing headboards.

continues to be its promotionally priced Strong Arm brand, patented in 2006, which features a cross-rail center support system that can be adjusted to fit varying widths of mattresses along with independently adjustable leg supports.

“Strong Arm is a nice alternative to the more expensive bed frames, yet still offers good support for beds with wooden side rails,” Cornelius says.

In early 2015, HSM plans to introduce a new version of the Strong Arm that allows frames to be positioned 4 inches off the floor. The current model adjusts from 5.25 inches to 16 inches high.

“Some of the new bedroom suites today require a frame that sits lower,” Cornelius says. “This new model will enable us to adapt to this emerging need.”



Moving with the market

W. Silver Products, a division of El Paso, Texas-based steel mill W. Silver Inc., has been steadily expanding distribution of its good-

better-best bed frame line since launching four years ago. Silver is the only bed frame supplier in the United States that produces its own bed rail steel, and this vertical integration allows the company to control costs and quality while passing savings on to customers, says Brent Polunsky, bedding support sales manager.

“We expect 2015 to be another awesome year for us,” Polunsky says. “We plan to open up two new distribution centers in the East and Northwest to augment our current distribution center in Texas. We look to grow our sales through additional furniture stores and sleep shops, as well as expand our private-label business with mattress manufacturers.”

In the coming year, W. Silver also plans to explore expanding its business with the hospitality community. “We see a big opportunity in this channel and will be developing new products designed for their needs.”

In 2015, W. Silver also plans to introduce a clip-on valance as a step-up item for its frames. “It will give us one more tool in the tool box as we go after today’s consumers’ changing tastes.”

The importance of options

At Forever Foundations, frame offerings include a range of three-in-one solutions that combine bed support, foundation and storage into one unit. And at the summer Las Vegas Market, the company showcased two super-sturdy platform bases, Foundation Plus and

(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/LPPrestige-Queen.jpg>)
Leggett & Platt’s ultra-strong Prestige bed frame, specially engineered for heavier premium mattresses, features three round, tubular steel center support legs on all sizes and triangular tubing side rails.

Foundation Max Plus, which retail from \$299 to \$599. In testing, the Max Plus base supported a 2-ton John Deere tractor without collapsing.

“We offer ‘Confidence from the Foundation Up,’ ” Rodgers says, referring to the company’s tagline, especially in reference to its heavy-duty products. “Nobody would put cheap, retread tires on a luxury car. So why place a \$2,500 to \$5,000 bed on a \$90 weak frame?”

Because some higher-end beds with sophisticated latex and gel components weigh more than innerspring models, they often need a more substantial frame or foundation to deliver proper support. “Too often, a support system is designed not to match the mattress but rather to deliver a price point that is as low as possible,” Rodgers says. “But the consumer deserves to be shown a range of foundations across several price points so they have a choice of features and can pick what’s right for them.”

If retailers show only a few low-end frames, that opportunity is never presented.

“Some people might say \$299 is too expensive for a foundation, but my answer would be ‘compared to what?’ ” Rodgers says. “A basic box spring and a steel frame runs about \$300 but doesn’t deliver nearly the same level of features.”



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Hollywood-E3-Box-photo.jpg>)

Hollywood Bed Frame Co. packages its E3 bed frame (next photo) in a colorful box with key features listed on the sides. The company is based in Commerce, California.



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Hollywood-7079BSG.jpg>)
The E3 from Hollywood Bed Frame Co.

Rodgers adds that in choosing the right product, the decision isn't just about how much weight the frame can support. "It's also about how that weight is supported."

To help salespeople convey the benefits of its line, the company offers a training program called Forever University. Available in print or online, the program provides resources and tools to educate RSAs about the role a foundation plays in quality sleep so that they, in turn, can communicate more effectively with their customers.

"The more trained and professional an RSA is, the more they understand why a quality sleep system needs a quality foundation," Rodgers says.

Selling benefits

To help RSAs bring its frame options to the attention of consumers, Leggett & Platt offers a three-tier, in-store display module with signage. The module showcases a good-better-best selection of miniframe, at a height that a consumer can easily inspect so that key product features can be seen and demonstrated.

"Frames can be merchandised just as effectively as bedding," says John Case, president of L&P's Consumer Products Group in Chicago. "But to be successful it takes a commitment to the category on the part of store owners and RSAs. With our point-of-purchase materials and other support, we provide effective tools for helping consumers better understand the benefits and strengths of our frames, rails and other support systems."

Case acknowledges that despite manufacturers' best efforts to put a brighter spotlight on the category, there's still a "lingering mindset" that frames are something to be given away or sold as cheaply as possible. "They address it only after the sale is complete rather than bringing it up within the context of the overall purchase."

Over time, he adds, the category also has a tendency to be relegated to a back corner of the store. "Our goal is to bring it back out in the open so that consumers can be shown a range of choices. When that happens, there's a good

opportunity for the RSA to sell a step-up frame and make a better margin. When a consumer is spending \$1,500 to \$2,000 on a bed, they don't mind spending more on a frame or foundation if it provides a better level of support."

One of Leggett & Platt's current best sellers is the Prestige frame. Priced at \$149 to \$199 retail, this frame features a unique tubular design specially engineered for today's heavier premium mattresses.

"This frame has nine points of contact with the floor and oversized glides that are ultra-strong and impact-resistant," Case says. "It's a step-up product, but it's better suited to the size and weight of today's bedding than a less-substantial frame would be."

In early 2015, Leggett & Platt plans to make some significant introductions to its frame offerings aimed at reinvigorating the category. "What will drive the category forward most is product innovation," Case says. "We need to provide compelling features that get both salespeople and consumers excited."

A new sense of style

Seeking to inject more style into the category, Hollywood Bed Frame Co. recently added a new line of designer bed frames in tubular steel called EnVision. Priced at \$129 to \$169 retail for queen and king sizes, EnVision features a powder-coated Palladium Silver finish. The nine-legged frame also boasts a unique wedge lock leg design, side inserts to hold the box spring in place and longer 75-inch side rails for added support.

"Most frames on the market are cocoa brown," says Jon Mullinax, vice president of sales and marketing of the Commerce, California, company. "EnVision's silver tone stands out, creating a chic, contemporary look that doesn't require a bed skirt or dust ruffle."

With its enhanced styling and features, EnVision offers retailers the opportunity to up-sell their clientele and increase sales, Mullinax adds. "It's a step-up product that is clearly differentiated from other frames."

In May, Hollywood Bed also started production of its new E3 steel frame. Priced to retail from \$99 to \$129, this one-size-fits-all model is designed to be packed in a compact box for easy transport, making it an appealing choice for Internet

and cash-and-carry customers. It uses a proprietary Lev-R-Lock design that assembles without tools and is tested to hold up to 2,000 pounds.

The model is the only bed frame package that meets the requirements of the International Safe Transit Association's 3A test protocol, Mullinax says.

"Everything is in one box, which can be easily loaded into a small car or shipped by UPS or FedEx right to your home," Mullinax says. "And our package is built to withstand all kinds of handling in transit without any damage."

The frame already has become Hollywood's No. 2 model in production volume. The company has licensing agreements with both Serta and Simmons, and it also offers its own Hollywood Bed version.

"It's generating a lot of sales for retailers like Costco, but we also expect sleep specialists to do well with it," Mullinax says. "To help drive sales, we've designed the box as a colorful point of sale item, with all of the key features listed on the sides."

Hollywood also offers a point-of-sale display rack that holds eight units, with one box positioned horizontally so that all of the features can be easily read.

"We want bed frames to become a profit center for the retailer and, to achieve that, the category has to be merchandised so that consumers see what's available," Mullinax says. "If a retailer only offers a \$49 model, that's what the consumer is going to buy. But that may not be the best frame for their needs. The customer should be given the opportunity to buy the best product they can afford."

Easy assembly, easy shipping

Also introducing a new shippable base at the summer Las Vegas Market was Salem Sleep Products in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. The new Port-A-Foundation features a wooden slat foundation that is easily assembled without tools using a patent-pending interlocking system. Available in twin through king sizes, the foundation ships in a single compact box, lowering freight charges and reducing warehouse space.

This new base has been a hit with online retailers looking for a compact foundation that can be shipped directly to consumers by UPS or FedEx along with their mattress orders, Larry Craver, president, says. “And we’ve gotten a lot of interest from mattress manufacturers and sleep shops, too. They like the fact that this foundation is so easy to transport—it can go anywhere and doesn’t take up a lot of space on a truck.”

To accommodate heavier specialty mattresses, Salem Sleep developed a Euro-type version of the Port-A-Foundation in black spruce with 16 slats spaced 2.5 inches apart.

“It provides more stability for heavier mattresses while also remaining flexible, making it a good match for latex,” Craver says. Queen versions retail for about \$279. The company also is developing a less expensive version using hardwood to provide a match for beds at lower price points.

At the fall High Point Market in High Point, North Carolina, Salem Sleep introduced a metal Euro-slat foundation that is shippable. The company also is developing decorative side panels that snap onto the sides of its foundations as an accessory.

Targeting the young

Seeing an emerging market among Millennials, Boyd Specialty Sleep introduced a new metal platform bed package last summer that includes headboard, footboard and side rails shipped as one flat-packed unit. Priced at \$199 to \$299 retail, the program features five contemporary designs with new models under development.

“Millennials today don’t need or want a box spring,” says Denny Boyd, president of the Maryland Heights-Missouri-based company. “Most of the box springs today are just bulky wooden boxes with fabric and they don’t add any significant value to the purchase. Younger consumers want something that is mobile so that they can move it easily. We’re offering a complete bed solution in a box that assembles in five to 10 minutes with no tools, and it doesn’t cost much more than a box spring and a basic metal frame.”

Another successful Boyd product that can be shipped is its EuroBase platform bed frame, introduced in 2013, which also takes the place of a box spring or foundation. Constructed with a European-style slat system, the EuroBase provides a spring-like feel. Adjustable “sleeves” allow users to customize the level of support from firm to plush to respond to different sleeping styles. Optional rollaway storage drawers are available.

“This system provides the response that traditional box springs used to provide,” Boyd says. “When you sit or lie down, the frame absorbs the movement and flexes, giving the mattress additional life.”

To make it easier for its retailers to sell its products, Boyd has introduced a new direct-ship service, which fulfills orders directly from its warehouses in Los Angeles and St. Louis to consumers in three to four days. The program includes all its bases and mattresses.

“The retailer doesn’t have to stock any of our products, which saves them money on both warehousing and delivery,” Boyd says.

A personal touch

Walton, Ohio-based Mantua Mfg.’s Express Yourself frame, introduced at the summer market in Las Vegas, adds a new dimension to the basic metal frame by allowing consumers the ability to personalize. Options include a choice of wood or stainless steel legs and a 16-color assortment of side-rail valances, in both wood grain and fabric looks, as well as contemporary and traditional styles.

The frame-valance combo retails for \$149, and valances also are available separately for \$59 a pair if consumers decide they want to change colors later.

“Retailers are really excited about this,” says David Jaffe, president. “Express Yourself gives retailers a chance to make more profit with each frame sale, and it also creates an opportunity for them to sell more valances in the future.”

In addition, Express Yourself offers retailers an inexpensive way to jazz up floor displays and build brand identity, Jaffe says. “Each valance can be printed on, so retailers have the ability to add a logo or a message. Some retailers have talked about using green valances on all their organic mattresses, or changing their displays to pink valances during Breast Cancer Awareness Month.”

The program allows bed frames to become more of a design element, Jaffe says. “Bed frames have never been a sexy product. Most people buy them and then cover them up as quickly as possible with a dust ruffle. With Express Yourself, the frame is part of the room design.”

The Express Yourself program taps into consumers’ increasing desire for customized products, Jaffe adds. “From iPhone cases to fast-food toppings, today’s consumers like having a wide range of choices.”

Mantua’s current best-selling model is its Sealy Posturepedic series. According to Jaffe, the retail frame’s extra length and strength provides more stability and support than conventional bed frames and eliminates tipping when a person is seated at the foot of the bed.

“The patented level-design construction provides proper alignment and support for the box spring, reducing stress and the potential for noise,” he says.

To be successful with the bed frame category, Jaffe recommends that retailers carry a good-better-best assortment. Mantua’s standard frame line starts at \$39 and tops out at \$99 for its Sealy model.

“If a retailer only offers a basic, low-end model, they’re missing an opportunity,” he says.

Fashion plus function



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Forever-Foundations.jpg>)

In 2012, Knickerbocker Bed Frame Co. helped bring bed support systems out of the shadows with the introduction of its emBrace system. Available in four colors, emBrace features high-strength steel wrapped in a plastic resin. The use of color adds a fashion element that had been missing in the category, says Joe Hunt, vice president of sales and marketing of the Carlstadt, New Jersey-based company.

The Store More platform base, from Irvine, California-based Forever Foundations, offers 14 inches of vertical under-mattress storage.

“EmBrace provides consumers with a stylish frame that fits in with their other furnishings, and it also

enhances the look of the bedding department,” he says.

Priced at \$300 to \$400 retail, emBrace can be used freestanding or in conjunction with an existing headboard. The product has no exposed steel or sharp edges, and the polymer coating offers a soft look that is different from most traditional bed frames.

“Anyone can put emBrace together in a matter of minutes, and it’s easy to move from room to room,” Hunt says.

By extending toward the foot of the bed, the emBrace features complete “seat-edge support,” he says. “This prolongs the life of the box springs and provides a completely stable base for the mattress.”

Stability is a particularly important issue with today’s heavier one-sided and specialty mattresses, he adds. With seven legs in queen size and nine legs in king size, emBrace is capable of supporting as much as 2,000 pounds.

“Our steel is nonyielding, which helps the mattress last longer and also reduces any movement that would otherwise occur when two people are on the bed.

“Mattresses and box springs are getting heavier and heavier, along with the U.S. population, so it’s important to have a solid frame in place that can support that weight,” Hunt says.

Platforms for storage

With space at a premium in so many of today’s homes, platform bed frames that provide room for storage are growing more popular.

“Consumers like having room under the bed for storage,” says Dennis Rodgers, president of Forever Foundations in Irvine, California.

“It’s space that otherwise goes unused, so it can be a big plus to a space-crunched shopper.”

Forever Foundations’ line of all-steel platform bases replaces the standard metal frame and box spring combination with a three-in-one solution: support, foundation and storage. Its Store More model offers 13-inch side access with 14 inches of vertical under-mattress storage.

“With Store More, consumers can slide a bunch of bins under the frame to store bedding or other items,” Rodgers says. “And the entire area is easy to clean under and around, so dust doesn’t accumulate.”



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The Store More platform base, from Irvine, California-based Forever Foundations, offers 14 inches of vertical under-mattress storage.

footboard, offers the equivalent storage of a six-drawer dresser.



(<https://106uet1e7m0i2uu4at364kpm-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Seahawk-Sto-a-way.jpg>)

Seahawk Designs’ patented Sto-A-Way wooden mattress foundation incorporates four oversized, full-extension drawers. Seahawk is based in Riverside, California.

A fabric deck provides additional support and allows the mattress to properly breathe, he says.

Seahawk Designs’ Sto-A-Way wooden mattress foundation offers another approach to under-bed storage, combining support with built-in function. This patented base system incorporates four oversized, full-extension drawers into a microfiber-covered foundation structure that replaces a standard box spring. The unit, which easily attaches to any headboard-